A brand new magazine! VOL. 08

C-pia!

C-PIA! MAGAZINE

In this issue!

「TOHEART」

2D VS 3D

SOMETHING SPECIAL ABOUT 「TAYUTAMA」

A SEPIA LENS LOOK AT 「AISP@CE」

And More!

C-pia!

This magazine is distributed for free.

Send all feedback, submissions, and business inquiries to
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c-pia.github.io

GS Mikami - Joreishi wa Nice Body

Platformer - Super Famicom

8/10

An action platformer developed by good old Natsume! You play as vain beauty Mikami Reiko, a money-hungry lady who runs an exorcism business.

You side-scroll through levels, dodging hazards, defeating enemies, and sealing the boss at the end of each level. It's more forgiving than the NES-era genre staples; I found the enemy layout of each level to be (mostly) memorable, and whenever I did die, it'd always give me the information I needed to progress. You can take quite a few hits, so it's forgiving without becoming mindless, and encounters are well-telegraphed.
Movement's snappy and feels great. It's just a solid platformer, one of the best on the system.

The most interesting thing about it (other than the aesthetic) is the focus on terrain effects. It starts off simply; first, it's a basic platformer, then it introduces doors that you have to attack to open. It's a small barrier that can trip you up if you leave enemies behind you.
But as you progress, you begin to find deeper concepts than physical barriers. One level has a river current underfoot, pushing you back, slightly but constantly. One level is an auto-scroller, making you duck and dodge parts of the environment while defeating enemies. It's short but fun.

Gals Panic S2

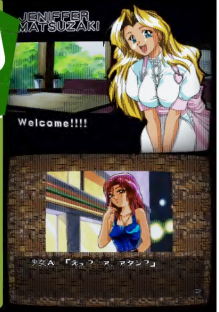
Puzzle - Arcade

7/10

From a famous franchise that barely breached Japan's borders. Why? Because porn, that's why. You're a simple dot on a blank 2D plane, behind it, a hidden illustration. A rectangle somewhere on the plane reveals a small amount of this illustration.

You can move in any direction, but you're locked to the edges of the revealed rectangle. Only by holding a button can you escape the revealed area, venturing into empty space. As you do so, a trail will follow behind you. If you let go of that button, you'll be dragged back along your trail. If you connect back to your starting point in a loop, the area your trail encloses will be revealed.

This revealed area is a safe zone, for you see, a boss from an STG lives in the blank area, and it'll be shooting at you, spawning adds, and reclaiming your captured land. If something hits you or your trail while you're beyond the revealed area, you die.
The aim of the game is to either reveal 80% of the field, or to encircle the enemy. It has clear goals for you to achieve, so I wouldn't treat this as endless fun, but it's a great game to 100%. If you'd prefer a story-focused adventure with branching routes, check out Silhouette Stories!



Fuujin Ryouiki Eretzvaju

Fighter - Playstation

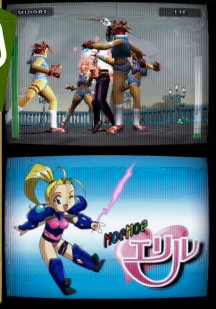
5/10

Localized into English as Evil Zone, this is a one-button fighter in the format of Virtua Fighter or Tekken.
With Mortal Kombat-style directional inputs, it's very beginner friendly, though it's quite shallow and kinda ugly.

Despite being a Playstation game, I'd describe it as having the atmosphere of a Dreamcast title.
That'll mean something to someone, I'm sure.

The main attraction, at least in the Japanese version, is the story. Pick a character and fight against the entire roster, one by one. Each character's campaign pays loving homage to a different genre of Japanese television.

There are constant unlockables to discover, and there is a pretty great 100% completion bonus to uncover.



C-pia! 2025 December

IN THIS ISSUE...

4 **Issue Introduction**

9 **ToHeart**
A large review of ToHeart PSE

22 **ToHeart 3D**
Is the 3D remake a worthy replacement?

27 **Tayutama**
A quick look at Mifuyu's route

31 **AiSp@ce**
Memories from an Akihabara long gone

What are you Reading? 09

It's a complete review of ToHeart PSE, Leaf's romance classic!

When the review is done, we see how the 3D remake compares.

27 Something Special About

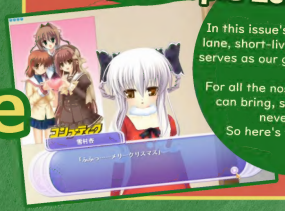
For something a bit more modern, this year's kawaiinium-published Tayutama release takes focus!

Game has an ojou-sama; C-pia! has a review.

31 A Sepia Lens...

In this issue's trip down memory lane, short-lived MMO AiSp@ce serves as our guide.

For all the nostalgia old games can bring, some things may never return.
So here's to a new year!



ISSUE INTRODUCTION

WELCOME TO THIS SPECIAL ISSUE OF C-PIA!

After a very busy 2025, a new issue of C-pia! Magazine is here in time for Xmas!

Every issue will begin with a short introduction alongside the contents and staff introductions.

Then we have 3 main articles to share!

In **What are you Reading?** one of our writers will talk a bit about a VN they've been reading.

It's a double-whammy of **ToHeart**!
2D Vs. 3D - which wins out?

There's something special about every game.

In **Something Special About...** we sit down to examine what makes a game so special.

Finally, a short stroll through memories of old.

Read **A Sepia Lens Look At** the classics which impacted our lives the most.

Looking for fanart, promotions, reader submissions and more!

Introducing the staff!

This issue is brought to you by:

Takafumi Sakagami

Goodbye 2025!

Favourite VN: Tomoyo After ~It's a Wonderful Life~
Favourite character: Tomoko Fujinami (Canvas2)

My first Visual Novel was Shuffle!. The anime adaptation chose the wrong girl!

Then **planetarian**, and the TLs for **Kanon** and **F/SN** dropped just in time to keep me reading. I was an addict from then on.

Our website has had a big update, so now you can read issues of C-pia! Magazine on our very own site!

For the full resolution, download is the way to go, but convenience has its charm.

c-pia.github.io

See Sepia-tan in motion on our site!

Studio Twinkle's dungeon crawler **Mime** has been translated into English courtesy of Valley Bell. I've been playing **Megami Tensei** recently, and this'll be my next DRPG for sure.

KakeraSKY's modern **Tsui no Sora** port is available for download, compatible with modern Windows, Mac and Linux.

Bet on horses and drink with ladies in **Gambler: Queen's Cup**, now in English.

Stardust Crusaders has translated the Gameboy game **Undercover Cops: Hakaishin Garumaa** for English players.

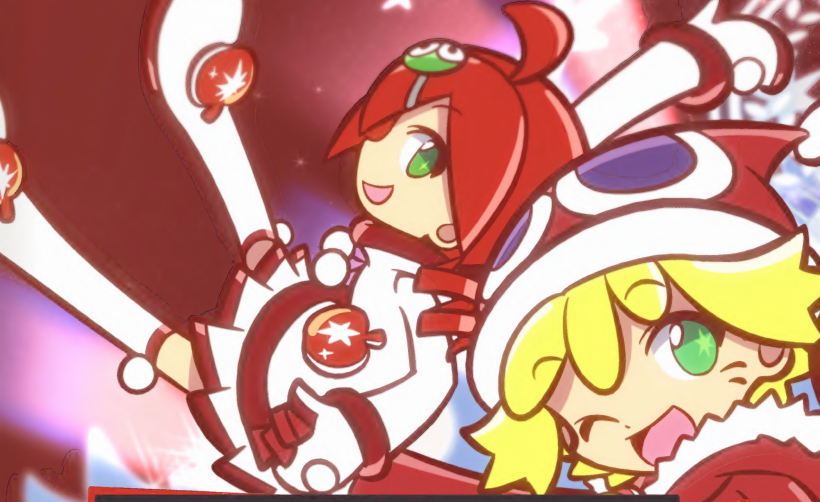
A fan translation of Micro Cabin's **Illusion City** for the MSX has been put together by MSX Translations. I'm a big Micro Cabin fan, and you should be too!

舞夢

Check our sources!
c-pia.github.io

BREAKING NEWS

Robot Girl's Dream Gets an Official English Release



A fan-made English translation for **Puyo Puyo!! 20th Anniversary** has released, and it works with the NDS, 3DS and PSP versions of the game! A patch to port the 3DS version's animations to PSP is also available.

Also, a translation for **Waku Waku Puyo Puyo Dungeon**—a dungeon-crawler for the Sega Saturn—is also out. The franchise is nearly fully playable in English!

Thanks to user Gopicolo, you can now play both the GBA adaptation of **Chobits** and **Di Gi Charat Fantasy Excellent** for the PS2 in English! The **Di Gi Charat** translation has also been ported to Dreamcast. This version has less content, but can be emulated on lower-end devices.

The PC-98 and SFC **Sword World** games are now in English thanks to Auquid and Bent! The 2nd SFC game and the 1st PC98 **Lodoss** game are also in the works.

Tobira no Densetsu, a free RPG known for its epic-length runtime, has received a fan translation under the name **Legend of Door**. Notably, it's an early RPGMaker title, so you can play it on EasyRPG-capable handhelds!

- True Love's English Translation ported to PC-9801!

A remake of the sixth **Eiyuu Densetsu** game, **Sora no Kiseki**, has been released on PC, Switch and PS5 as **Trails in the Sky 1st Chapter**. It's an RPG for readers.

D.C. Re:tune, the **Da Capo** remake, is available now. I'd recommend you play the Plus version instead to get all the routes, but this is a fine place to start.

A remake of **Shuffle!**, has been announced. How'd they make Sia even prettier?

Yuukyuu Gensoukyoku has received a remake, titled **Yuukyuu Gensoukyoku Revival**, and it looks to be one of the best remakes in the genre. Seriously!

Nonomura Byouin no Hitobito Remake has released in Japanese.
The team behind it, FG Remake, have also remade **Kakyuusei**! It comes with a mode that removes all the gameplay, allowing you to read it like an NVL.

BREAKING NEWS

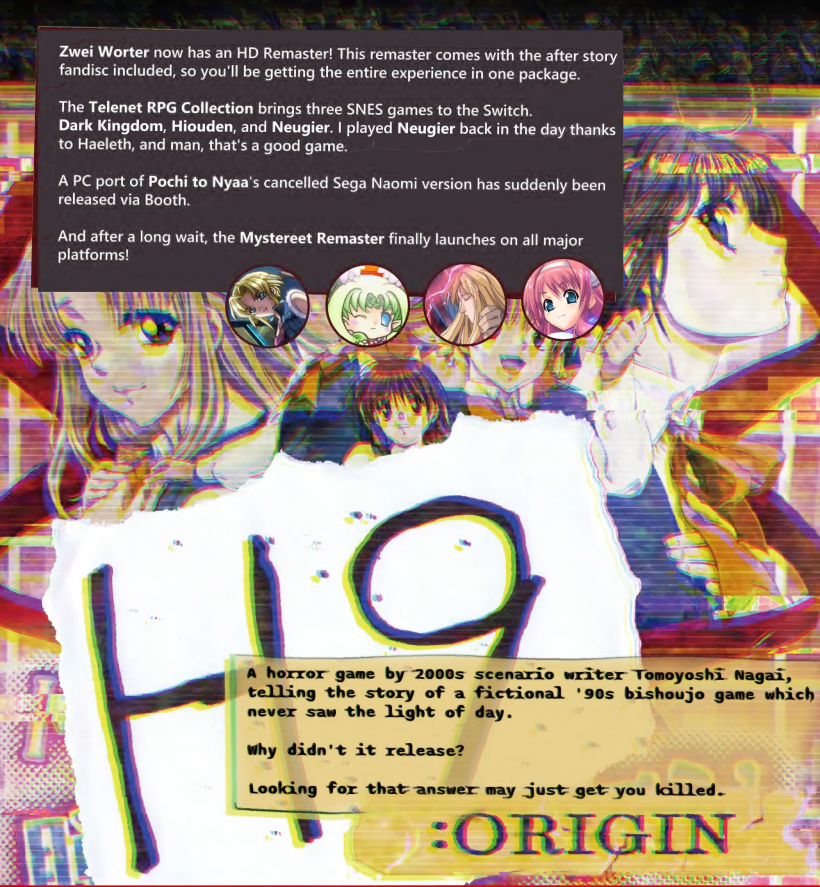
- The PSX's Serial Experiments Lain now in English

Zwei Worter now has an HD Remaster! This remaster comes with the after story fandisc included, so you'll be getting the entire experience in one package.

The **Telenet RPG Collection** brings three SNES games to the Switch. **Dark Kingdom**, **Hiouden**, and **Neugier**. I played **Neugier** back in the day thanks to Haeleth, and man, that's a good game.

A PC port of **Pochi to Nyaa**'s cancelled Sega Naomi version has suddenly been released via Booth.

And after a long wait, the **Mystereet Remaster** finally launches on all major platforms!


H9
A horror game by 2000s scenario writer Tomoyoshi Nagai, telling the story of a fictional '90s bishoujo game which never saw the light of day.
Why didn't it release?
Looking for that answer may just get you killed.
:ORIGIN

- Yoru ga Kuru! Remastered launches on Steam! -

What Are You Reading?

Continuing this magazine's obsession with Key and Leaf, the big game I'm reviewing this time around is **ToHeart**!

The original **To Heart** from 1997 was foundational in the world of PC ADVs, and even today I think that's the best looking and sounding version of the game!
Well, aside from the lack of voices...

But today, for reasons I'll explain later on in this volume, I'm not playing that game.
Instead, I'm playing a title named **ToHeart PSE**.

To cut a long backstory short, the developers pitched a Playstation game to Sony, yet Sony's response was slow.

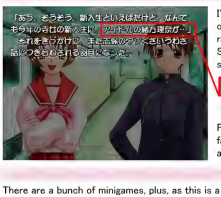
So instead, the team (as Leaf) made **To Heart** for the PC. Once they were done developing it, approval from Sony for the PSX game was given!

At this point, the staff decided to produce a sort of semi-remake, returning to the original **ToHeart** proposal and rebuilding the game to a different result.
One proposal; two games.

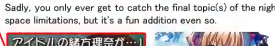
So many Versions!

I'm not here to explain the ins and outs of what's different between the two, but... just know, what I'm reviewing here isn't the original **To Heart**. I (just like the staff behind these titles) consider the two versions to be different games, and there are plenty of people who like one version far more than the other.

The Playstation version went on to be the base of every future port, so it's likely the most well known take on the **To Heart** story. But if you've watched the anime, that was based on the PC game instead... well, kinda. That's a topic for another time.



I'm playing **ToHeart PSE**, the PC port of the Playstation version, which comes with a bunch of bonuses beyond the new or rewritten content. There are some fun slightly-meta in-game radio shows you can tune into on the weekends.
Sadly, you only ever get to catch the final topic(s) of the night, likely because of PSX's disk space limitations, but it's a fun addition even so.



For Leaf fans, the PS-based versions include many cameos. You can look forward to seeing familiar faces in the backgrounds. Recognizable names may show up during small talk, such as everyone's favourite **White Album** character Rina! ...No, you're not allowed to retort that.

There are a bunch of minigames, plus, as this is a Playstation port, it comes with native gamepad support that almost works out of the box! Now, you will have to download the 1.01 update from *aquaplus.jp/th/* in order to get analogue sticks working on modern Windows, otherwise you won't be able to move up or down. Once that's installed, however, it works perfectly for everything.

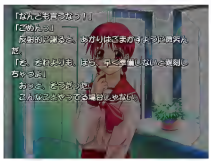
Sadly, and this may be the big deal breaker for **PSE**, these minigames aren't integrated into the PC port in the best way. In the PSX version these are added into the main game seamlessly as an element that branches the story, but playing on PC, the screen cuts to black and you choose whether you won or lost in the same way you'd make normal decisions. It feels very clumsy.
Furthermore, the UI for **PSE** is slightly different to the PSX original, and there are some tweaks to route progression here and there. I'd say the PSX version has more character, but **PSE** is probably more practical.

The Playstation-based versions also offer a cutely animated map to move around in. This is a choice mechanic, and it makes route completion easier, though not completely trivial.

What all this means (to me at least) is that, even for this specific iteration of the **To Heart** IP, there isn't really a best version. It's better on a Playstation in some ways but better on PC in others. That's not even getting into the original PC game from '97 or the 3D remake of **PSE**! You'll never get the best version of **ToHeart**.

KAMIGISHI AKARI 神岸あかり

It's Spring again, and it's in the midst of the season that our renameable protagonist ("Hiroyuki" by default) awakes to a visit from his childhood friend Akari.
After leaving his home, Hiro climbs a steep slope to arrive at highschool, barely on time, where he'll go on to meet a whole assortment of characterful girls.



Kamigishi Akari is a kind girl, straightforwardly so... If anyone is the face of the game, it's her.
Clearing her route even demands you treat the various heroines well, rather than the usual VN routine of ignoring everyone but the lady you're gunning for; that's the kind of person Akari is.

I'm certain that you readers of C-pia! will find Akari's route to be one of the more interesting routes, if only for its utilisation of nostalgia as a storytelling device.

As Hiroyuki's old friend, these two have a great rapport with one another, so their conversations are a total blast to read. Naturally, many of their convos are born out of this sense of familiarity, and oftentimes they end up talking about the past.

I've mentioned it first with **Crescendo** and again with **Parfait**, but this approach to storytelling is one that I'm quite fond of. The sentimental feeling of stepping into a story already half-told is always a nice one, I find.
It's particularly effective here because, in a manner similar to **Crescendo**, **ToHeart** is set during the formative years where change comes quickly and redefines your life entirely.

As two people who've been together for as long as they can remember, 'change' is both a worry as well as an eventuality. Maybe it's already begun happening, in small ways.
So, to retain their shared space, they reminisce over the connection they've maintained for so long, maybe becoming a bit too attached to it, at times.
It makes sense for the characters to do, and more than that, it adds to their characterisation while also serving as natural exposition to give readers more of an insight into the story's setting.
Combined with the approach to progression, which relies on some of the other heroines getting involved, it makes for one great intro.

But it's not just that; the two joke around with one another, plus they're pushy and confident when they're together in a way they're not when chatting with their other classmates. So this is a route that, in my eyes at least, makes its worth known immediately. It really doesn't matter what the quality of this route's story is, because every conversation had between Hiroyuki and and our heroine Akari is a blast.

To boot, some of the scenes involving the greater friendship group, Shiho and Masashi, are also real fun. There's one involving a pâtisserie that is beautifully done. It really illustrates so much about the group's relationship without saying anything directly. The writer trusts you to pick up on things.

Now, it'd be easy to turn the kind childhood friend character into a meek type else a gentle one, or instead go full **Urusei Yatsura** and focus on the assertiveness... but Akari isn't any of those.
She cares, though she's not overly polite. She's friendly, but she has rebellious energy as a young tomboy would. I don't know how else to describe her other than "normal".

There are tropey elements to her—she's a bit too perfect in a lot of ways—but even so, she doesn't feel like a caricature. That's particularly strange, not only because it makes Akari stand out amongst contemporary childhood friend heroines we were getting in these kinds of ADVs during the late '90s, but also because... I mean, this is **ToHeart.**
This is the novel with the clumsy robot, the oversized witch hat ojousama, and the eccentric rifle-wielding American dad.

At one point, Akari says...
"Superpowers do sound great, but I'd rather not have one."

Living in this setting that would go on to inspire, for one, **Da Capo**'s quirky cartoonyness, Akari is normal, refreshingly so.

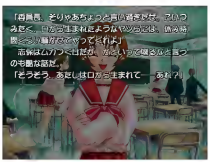
NAGAOKA SHIHO 長岡志保

Nagaoka Shiho is yet another old friend of Hiroyuki's. They have a real back-and-forth kind of relationship, one their classmates jokingly call a 'wife and husband' routine.

There's a lot of sarcasm, insults, and banter. You get the idea. Shiho even talks like a gossipy old house-wife sometimes, so the joke fits.

I'd say that, out of the box, Shiho's got my favourite design. She did in the OG, she does in the new 3D Remake, and... yeah, she does in the PSX version too.

Though when it came to the original PC **To Heart**, Shiho felt like... a relic of the genre, or maybe more of a transitionary element between '90s adventure games and the ones from the early 2000s.



In the Playstation game, **ToHeart**, this route got a lot of work done to it. I believe most people prefer this version, but I'd struggle to say which is better.

Living her school life as, well, an obsessive gossip, Shiho is very chatty with strangers and is well known through-out school, but she's not exactly the most responsible or thoughtful person in everyday life.

Her voice is loud, she's good at speaking and singing, also she likes going to the arcade. What a nerd!

But she's a bit of a fragile girl, at heart, and beneath all of the banter is an individual painfully aware of where they stand in the world, who lacks the self-respect to become anything else.

So of course, if you don't keep Hiroyuki's efforts studying in check, you can get shoved into those extra classes for dummies, and Shiho is one of those dummies.

If you get Hiroyuki stuck taking supplementary lessons, this leads the two (he and Shiho) to interact a lot more, which is a fundamental requirement for progressing with the route. This may be a game with a map screen, but blindly chasing Shiho will get you nowhere. You've gotta play it smart and turn Hiroyuki into an idiot.

If I were to describe this route's story contents, I'd liken it to a TV drama – a Japanese one, of course.

It's kinda trashy and melodramatic, but that's not really the full picture, as the plot is a relatively minor portion of the route's runtime.

Much of the route proper is dedicated to watching these two banter in class, study together after school, and play around at the arcade.

A particularly fun element of this route lay in the rare bit of PSE-compatible gameplay. You'll be hanging out with Masashi when Shiho loudly interrupts with a threat: *"Stop or I'll shoot!"* Suddenly you're playing Virtua Cop!

Here's my score. You can probably do better, right?

Aside from that, I'm not really a fan of this route. Not much happens in it, most of the plot is backloaded, and what little plot there is feels very rushed.
The best thing about it is getting to see the strict linchou character tell Shiho off for being noisy.

MIYAUCHI LEMMY 宮内レミィ

Our token transfer student, Miyauchi Lemmy, hails from San Francisco, California. Expect a lot of English and some mistranslation jokes whenever she's on screen.
She's not exactly elegant or good at formal talk, nor is she studious, but she used to go hunting with her family as a kid in Oregon, so she's real good at shootin' stuff! A true American to foreign eyes.

Lemmy's a real odd one. She's far more open and... affectionate than the other girls, and yet she's secretive in her own ways.

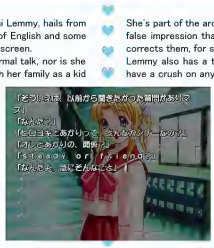
It's a clash that, relative to the rest of the cast, makes Lemmy hard to initially understand. Sometimes you can't tell if she's genuinely attached to Hiroyuki or or if it's just her friendly demeanour at work.
Sometimes, you can't tell if she's actually hiding something meaningful; maybe she's simply trying to look cool or smart by not explaining things.

It's weird to say about a character that is so obviously an exaggerated American stereotype at her roots, but Lemmy is an incredible implementation of foreign culture within an otherwise homogeneous system.
The social dynamic between Hiroyuki and the louder Shiho will be different from how Hiro interacts with, say, the calm Akari, but they still both feel like they're on the same axis of communication. The laws and expectations of conversation are the same between all three.

Lemmy... is not that. She's in her own world, playing by her own rules, using language without any of the baggage of connotation, and I don't think the other characters know what to make of that exactly.

Some handle it better than others, and Shiho naturally takes any conversation in stride, yet the distinctiveness of Lemmy's presence is impossible to ignore.

I'm not saying you would *want* to ignore her, of course. Lemmy is great!



She's part of the archery club, and the other members get the false impression that Hiroyuki is her boyfriend. Lemmy never corrects them, for some reason.
Lemmy also has a tendency to ask questions like... does Hiro have a crush on anyone? Or... does he love Lemmy? She'll be disappointed when Hiro tells her he likes her, but doesn't love her.

It's that kind of stuff that makes her feel either stupidly transparent or strangely opaque. It doesn't help that she wears a cheery expression in almost any scenario.

A cheery expression and a lively voice – The voice is really what makes Lemmy work. I found myself reading her scenes with more anticipation because I wanted to hear how her actor would say her lines.

This degree of lively openness from Lemmy is enough to force Hiroyuki out of his usual tsundere demeanour, so compared to his typical attitude, he's a bit more honest around her.

Here's some honesty from me – I struggled to complete this route. I dunno what I was doing so wrong, but I couldn't figure out how to trigger the date at the arcade, so I kept getting a bad end.
Maybe I didn't spend enough time with Akari and Shiho at the arcade, so it didn't unlock?
Whatever the solution, I brute forced my way to the correct ending.

When it comes to that ending, and to the route as a whole, it, once again, feels rushed... They introduce practically a whole cast of characters on the penultimate day, and like... Lemmy's sister is the true best girl, but getting a route's worth of plot in a hurry at the very end isn't very entertaining to me.

If the route were a word, it'd be: *pointless*.

HMX-12 "MULTI" チルマ

Mid-way through the game, some candid info about the **ToHeart** world will drop out of nowhere: maid robots exist in setting, and they're practically indistinguishable from people. These robots aren't usually seen in schools, but one of them, having been developed as a prototype by Kurusugawa Corp. (remember that), enrolls as a student, as part of an ongoing test for potential future robot lines.

Most usually designed to be capable at menial tasks such as household chores, the maid robot HMX-12, product name: Multi, is famously clumsy. She stutters and stammers, makes regular mistakes and has plenty of errors, yet she knows just how much effort her creation cost, so she always tries her best to behave as a maid robot should.

The influence this character had is everywhere. I was playing an arcade game named **Gals Panic S2** through August, and there's a secret boss in it named RZX-G775.
Funnily enough, a **To Heart**-themed clone of the **Gals Panic** games was later developed by fans! ...it's not as good.

Why did Multi have such influence? Simply put, she's cute.
There's a scene where you can offer to help her clean the school hallways, and she runs off to show you the distance she's meant to clean.
She then proceeds to continue the conversation from 15-meters away, her voice barely reaching. It's very charming.

You find her taking care of a dog; she and the dog proceed to have a formal conversation no one else can understand. She kindly declares Hiroyuki to be the nicest person she's ever met; she's been alive for two weeks.
When she gets embarrassed, her fans'll whir up, and a cloud of steam will flush over her.

There are so many silly aspects to the character that make her fun to spend time with.
This earnest personality contrasts well with the mischievous but kind-hearted Hiroyuki, whose natural inclination is to, of course, prank the innocent robot girl and lead her down the path of truancy. Every time, when faced with Multi's genuine attempts to do her best, he feels guilty about his own lazy attitude and lack of responsibility, then tries to make up for it.
It's an entertaining back-and-forth.

But it's the structure of the route that makes it stand out, and that's weird to say, because... the structure of Multi's route is very vanilla.
Yet a lot of the basics we may view as guarantees today are missing of routes in these older works, and it's Multi's route where those basics are set in stone for our future.

It builds to its greatest moments in a way that makes sense, and that's something that even the industry's most acclaimed writers struggle with today.

But... due to Multi's nature as a maid robot, one thing does become painfully clear: Hiroyuki lacks as a character.
This is a route that highlights things such as housekeeping, yet Hiroyuki lives in an empty household.
This is a route that questions the 'humanity' of robots, yet Hiroyuki lacks human connection.
This is a route about treasuring life, yet Hiroyuki coasts on by with little thought.

If this were a story that inspired self-awareness in Hiroyuki and pushed him to improve, all of those details would make for one great starting point.
And it's not like he's stagnant or anything. He does change, in ways, from the starting point each route begins with.

I feel that this route provides a decent experience, but it also provides the groundwork of a great experience. That ground-work is never built upon, not by **ToHeart**, at least.
But other writers, inspired by Multi, would go on to do the building in other games, with different characters using different names.
It's foundational.

HOSHINA TOMOKO 保科智子

Frowny girl Hoshina is introduced to us as a fish out of water. She's the class president, and she wears glasses, so you know she's smart. She comes with a nice dialect.

Hiroyuki happens to witness a group of girls getting angry at her, and for just cause. She's not the kind of girl who'll go out of her way to fit in.
Hiro himself is a bit of an awkward guy when he's not with his childhood buds, and it leads to an initial dynamic of unease, with unspoken apologies aplenty.

To put it in simple terms, they're both tsundere.

Let me be straightforward here.
Hoshina Tomoko is my favourite of the **To Heart** heroines. I'm not a 'glasses girl' design fan usually, so I didn't think I would like her until I finally sat down with **To Heart** and met her. In **ToHeart**, she's even better.

I feel like her design has improved quite a bit compared to her original design which was a bit rough around the edges. I mostly prefer **To Heart**'s designs, but this is an exception. Her voice in this game is incredible. The accent can be a bit over-the-top and silly, (heck, they even throw in the ol' stereotypical McDonald's conversation) and the loud volume of her anger can be a bit much, especially if you—like I...—end up playing this route directly after Serika's...
But the quiet moments with the character are still amazing, and that's where her voice truly shines.

But really, it's the personality which makes her my favourite of the heroines. If the tsundere types that I so often write about in this magazine are overly prideful types, then think of Hoshina as the opposite of that.

She does have some pride in her own unique way—she's not entirely prideless—but she's more than willing to put herself down in order to avoid dealing with someone.
A large factor behind that is certainly born from an obvious aspect of her character: she's an outsider. She doesn't have any friends, she has a thick accent and her overly combative nature results in her being bullied.

Happening upon the intro portion of her route while going through other girls' routes, I was always more engaged with her small scenes than I was with all the surrounding scenes pertaining to the routes I was actually chasing.
I think the reason for that is twofold.

Firstly, to explain how the heroines are introduced to the player. They come in two waves. Well, there are two special heroines that only appear once you've cleared certain routes, but uh... keeping with that original cast, Hoshina's is the one heroine route in the first wave that comes with an immediate hook.

So, for half of the common route, she's where all of the story is.

Secondly, it's in all that comes after. The routes covered so far have this everydayness which they maintain up until the end, when a plot beat abruptly takes over. The structure of them prioritises establishing a daily pattern of interaction between the protagonist and heroine so that, when the daily pattern is eventually broken, you begin to miss it.
Hoshina's route breaks free from that structure.

Familiarity and stagnancy may not be complete synonyms, and this is a route that sets to prove that; it's constantly pushing on with things, allowing time to pass and alter the lives our two focal characters are living, and in place of the big late-route reminiscence session other parts of **ToHeart** will throw at you, there's a careful sequence of repetition, in small ways; in scenes, in settings, and even in CGs!

Conversations conclude, only to be picked up and reframed by words of hindsight. Sadly, I'm not sure the game is really built to handle this type of route.
Our protagonist Hiroyuki ends up feeling out of character at points in order to support some moments of sentimentality. The limited soundtrack leaves well-written scenes without ideal musical accompaniment. The lack of much classroom dynamic puts our linchou character in a position where her role in the classroom feels like an afterthought.

It's the kind of story that I think of when I imagine a D.O. or GIGA game, but it's trapped within a game better suited to silly slice of life. But having good writing and a cute girl is crucial for a route, so... it succeeds where it matters most.

HIMEKAWA KOTONE 姫川琴音

In the year below Hiro, this new student causes quite a stir. Rumours quickly circulate that a girl named Himekawa Kotone is, in reality, an esper. She predicts tragedies, sends objects flying without touching them, and sometimes, when she walks past a window, it'll shatter.

But these aren't just rumours. Upon first meeting her, Hiro watches as a window shatters for seemingly no reason!

Kotone is a shy ojou type who speaks in an uncertain whisper, keeping to herself to avoid getting others tangled up in the strange things going on around her.

Her refusal to interact with others is a show of politeness on Kotone's part, but it's also a defence mechanism.
After all, rumours about her've reached Hiroyuki's ears before he'd even met her. The whole school has likely heard stories about her crazy psychic powers.

But Hiroyuki, knowing that the prime rumourmonger in school (Shiho) is not to be trusted, approaches Kotone out of pure curiosity; clearly, there's something going on, but... he's not convinced of anything quite yet.

I find the integration of Hiro and Shiho's dynamic as part of the establishment of the Hero x Heroine interactions here very interesting. We know that Shiho loves to babble about anything she can, and we know that Hiroyuki will always take her stories as nonsense and sometimes attempt to prove her wrong, to get one over on her.
So it feels quite natural for Hiroyuki to begin interacting with Kotone here.

We also know, from the other routes, that despite his blunt attitude, Hiro really worries about people's mental health. If the idea gets into his head that someone may be crying in private, he tends to chase after them. It's a core aspect of the Hoshina route, and it plays into two other heroines' back-stories as well.

So again, it feels natural for Hiroyuki to continue to interact with Kotone, even when Kotone solemnly requests to be left alone. She's obviously not a happy person.

Another interesting aspect of the route is that, once you get involved with Kotone, a lot of her scenes play out as normal scenes. What I mean by this is, rather than a majority of their interactions being contained to a select location on the map and rarely breaching beyond the resulting scenes, this route is spread out a lot more evenly.

Personally, I don't think map systems are very satisfying. I've spoken about this before in my **Perfait** write-up, but it often creates a setting that feels fragmented—the routes feel more like self-contained stories than alternate outcomes of one established environment.

Having a single route that extends beyond the map screen doesn't really fix any of the issues the map screen is prone to create, but... I appreciate the change of structure.

There are some similarities to Aoi's route, however, and if you progress through the two routes at the same time (as I did) it can get repetitive.

As this is a route about a psychic girl, let's talk time period stuff a bit. **Marica** featured in this very magazine not long ago, and that was a very action-heavy take on the concept. **ToHeart**, however, focuses on daily life.
So the angle the writer takes to examine the concept of an esper puts emphasis on the social aspect of things. How does it affect one's life growing up? What is their reputation like as a result?
How does it alter their relationships and hobbies?

But an emphasis is also put on conventional understanding of the mind. Human intelligence is one thing, but as we can only view things through that intelligence, truly comprehending the intelligence of other beings is impossible.

To examine this point, Dolphins are the animal of choice.
They are intelligent, but they don't have a Human society. Do they have any ideas similar to 'good' and 'evil' in their hearts? Do they have morals? Does the lack of any of those things determine whether they're inferior to Humans?
To us, maybe, but we are Human. There's an obvious bias.

In a recent blog post I reviewed an RPG about espers named **Hoshi wo Miru Hito**. There are a lot of internet myths about that game, and one of them is that it lacks an ending. That's not true, but it's a common belief.

HoshiMiru is a dystopian sci-fi story, in which the Dolphins have usurped Humans as the dominant life form, and their view on everything is different to what we prioritise. There's a natural conflict to be had there.
What the game lacks is a final boss. There's no big battle. You can't outskill a Dolphin. It's not that kind of story.

"The Human concept we call 'good' isn't necessarily a global good. Humans just decide what's right and wrong, then get blinded by those standards."
An author Kotone likes wrote such a thing.

In reading this route, I reached an understanding of **Hoshi wo Miru Hito**'s story. The idea that, at the end of a story, the good guys should challenge the evil boss to a final battle, all to decide the fate of the planet...
It's a very Human standard, isn't it?

MATSUBARA AOI 松原葵

Matsubara Aoi is one of several students who enrols mid way through the game, and she's hoping to start a club. But she lacks the connections required to do so! She invites our Hiroyuki on the off chance he'll accept.
Curious, Hiroyuki decides to check Aoi's club out. What club is it? The MMA club, of course!

Compared to the rest of the routes, this route involves a single-minded approach. Visit the club when Aoi is training there, over and over, as often as you can.

What follows is (more often than not), a scene of the two practising and flirting. Seriously, Hiroyuki is a lot more forth-coming about his interests in this one, but Aoi never takes his blunt comments seriously.

Aoi is the earnest type, similar to Multi in a lot of ways, but with a small amount of aggression added on top. She's on a different wavelength to normal people, but she's passionate about her sport, and that passion carries her forward.
She enjoys the life she's living, even if it's different to what most girls her age would like.

It's because of seeing Aoi work so hard for a dream that the otherwise unmotivated Hiroyuki decides to change up his life. He starts working hard, visiting the club daily and getting the most out of his youth.
Now, he doesn't plan on actually joining the club, because he doesn't want to hold her back, but one thing leads to another, some drama begins to brew, and he joins the club in the spur of the moment in order to win an argument. That's probably as noble as it gets for ol' Hiroyuki here.

In reading the route, there was one idea that came to mind, but it's not an idea directly commented on by the writer. It's actually something quite obvious, now that I think about it, but I hadn't really considered it before...

When it comes to Japanese media focused on youthful days, they often focus on a late high school period. That's true today, as it was 30 years ago — there's a reason we have so many graduation games available to play.

Yet as formative as those youthful days may be... they are but a follow-up to more youthful, more formative days. That is the thought that came to mind as I watched Aoi train her heart out.
In the healing everyday routine of **ToHeart**, Hiroyuki makes life-changing decisions that drastically change the future. And this is a route where he is responsible for a person's career as an athlete, so the importance of his presence is clearer than ever.

But on Aoi's side, the importance of the present day is driven by yesterday. Her reasons for training this hard all came before high school life. The friendships and rivalries she has formed came not from **ToHeart**'s story, but from an older one, untold to everyone but her.

That—I think—is what drives Hiroyuki forward in this route. Because, as a reader stuck to his point of view, these high school days are when he turns things around and starts to take life seriously, not just coasting along with his three life-long friends following his ambitionless routine.

He's put face-to-face with a girl who, despite her age, has found reason to need courage, to put in effort, to plan ahead. I find the contrast interesting. Thinking back, there was an early scene where I thought to myself...
"Hiroyuki really sounds like an old man sometimes..."
It felt as if he was being written like an adult who misses his youth. But now I get it... It wasn't nostalgia; it was envy.

Hiro sees the spark of life in Aoi, and in his desire to admire her just a little bit longer, he begins to shine bright as well.

Hiding behind the facade of an ordinary school life route, the Aoi route put me into analysis mode more than any other.

KURUSUGAWA SERIKA 来栖川芹香

Today's ojousama character is this dark-haired beauty, Kurusugawa Serika. She looks cool and mature from afar, but she's a real oddball. I'm sure you've seen her wearing a witch hat at least once.
Her hobbies include magic, spiritualism, and—! ...Occultism.

If I had to recommend her any of the games we have covered so far, I'd pick **L no Kisetsu**. Big fan of demons, this lady.

Serika is famous at school due to her beautiful looks and family's status, yet she's a bit of a lonely figure. Why, you ask? Because... she's practically mute! The way dialogue flows during a lot of her scenes is entirely via Hiroyuki; he repeats back what she whispers to the reader so that we can understand her, and it's quite weird.

After spending a bit of time with her, chatting and getting his fortune told, Hiro is invited to sit in her club activities. What club? The Occult Research Club, of course!
There are a few members other than Serika, I think... It's a bit hard to tell how many there are exactly, because the other club members are all ghosts, and, well, Hiro can't see or hear them! They definitely make their presence known in other ways, though.

Perhaps it's due to this lack of voices that I began paying extra attention to the visuals. That must be the case, as I ended up with the feeling that... this route sorely lacks CG illustrations in a way that the other routes do not.

Serika feels like a remnant from a different game.
In translating her into this full voice iteration of **ToHeart**, the awkward choice to write a heroine who communicates almost exclusively through an unvoiced protagonist really sticks out.

"What's that? You're worried you'll get a bad review? No no, don't worry."

"Huh? It's okay to not like your route? Well, I wouldn't say I dislike it..."

Now honestly, this might sound weird, but I do understand the appeal of this route and in isolation it actually works in an oddly effective manner. It's only when you place it in context with the rest of the game that these decisions made with the Serika route stick out as obviously negative, but the deeper into the route I got, the more I grew acclimated to its... uh, unique style.

It's funny. You could liken what I just said to Serika herself. She's odd, so it takes some time for Hiroyuki to acclimate himself to her, but once he does, he's smitten.

If I had to describe **ToHeart** as a whole, I think I would call it an iyashikei, but only with an asterisk at the end. It's a game largely about mundane living in a mundane yet weird setting, but there's always a big plot thing bolted onto the end or a tense decision to make during the mid-portion of a route in order to add some sense of stakes.
Maybe the writers will even throw in something depressing, though there's more of that in **To Heart** than **ToHeart**.

This route doesn't have that asterisk. It is iyashikei through and through, and if you're a fan of calm, relaxing stories that warm your heart... well, Serika here will pat you on the head and wish for you to be happy, all without saying a word.

There's something quietly alluring about it, and that took me by surprise. The resulting emotions I hold towards it remind me of Shirakawa Kotori's route in **Da Capo**; it's not the main route, and I don't think it's the best route, nor is it the route I'd be soonest to recommend, but it's the one that stands out in the most positive way.

And so, it ends up being the first route I recall when I think of **ToHeart**...

Even though it's so different from the rest.

KURUSUGAWA AYAKA 来栖川綾香

Though not a main heroine in **To Heart**, the younger sister of Serika has taken her place alongside the other heroines for **ToHeart**. The Kurusugawa Ayaka route is the major addition for marketing purposes, yet it's not available by default, and it's not actually a massive addition.

You'll probably first meet her while going through Serika's route, though I believe she only shows up twice there. The first instance is also linked to Aoi's route, as part of the reason Aoi trains so hard is due to Ayaka's influence.

It's only after meeting her and clearing Aoi's route that Ayaka begins to appear elsewhere in the game.

She makes her entrance as heroine via the messiest CG in the game. She and Hiro team up to help a little girl's cat out of a tree. After that, it'll be a while before you see her again, so a lot of the early portion of the common route is similar to Serika's, with a bit of Aoi mixed in towards the end.

She is, like her sister, an oddball. However, she's an oddball in the complete opposite sense. She's so chatty that she forgets about her surroundings.
She's very forthright about her feelings.
She's physically active, a tomboy, and she feels a slightly older than she actually is.

There's also something to be said for her presence in other heroines' lives. She's Serika's sister, she's a friend of Aoi, and her family's corporation invented Multi. Before unlocking her, you're only aware that she exists... but after unlocking her, it's hard to believe they didn't spend time together sooner.

It reminds me of one friend I had in high school. We met in our second year, and both assumed that the other was a transfer student.

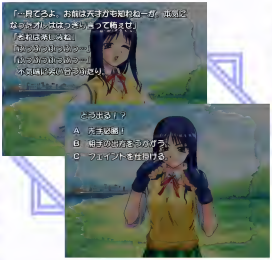
Our friendship circles totally overlapped, and we knew literally everyone else at school, but somehow, we'd never learned about one another until then.
That's the sort of position these two are in. One should at least be aware of the other, but they aren't.

But as it so happens, this energetic, rebellious tomboy type character has a lot in common with Hiroyuki. The pair get along swimmingly. They both love to mess around, they will spontaneously start competitions with others, and avoid their life responsibilities.

I think the image the author was going for with their back-and-forth is... soulmates. That's an odd choice in a game all about romancing several heroines and exploring different possibilities, so it's not a theme you'd expect to be directly tackled.
Well, it's not direct here, but the subtext is obvious.

Despite how, uh... direct... our two focal characters can be, it is a story of things unsaid. There's a confidence that the two hold, and using that confidence, they're able to trust in one another without discussing it beforehand. That's how similar they can be.

But as I said before, it's not a large addition to the game. The route begins quite late into the common route, and a chunk of that route is spent flashbacking to prior scenes.
It feels padded out in a way no other route does.



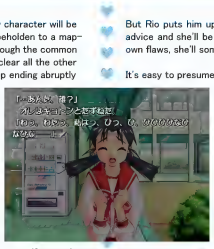
It also ends in an abrupt manner, in my opinion. Also, in the mid-section (which is where most of the story is) it becomes incredibly repetitive, with lines being padded out by written sound effects and single-word sentences.

If the addition of this route were the only change made in the transition from PC to Playstation, I'm really not sure I'd ever recommend it. Why? Because this is easily the worst route in the game, not for failing to do good, but for failing to feel like a fully realized route.

Even with my bias towards cool, tomboyish ladies... there's no reason to read this.

HINAYAMA RIO 雛山理緒

Upon clearing the Akari route, a new character will be added to the common route. She's not beholden to a map-based meeting, and if you're skipping through the common route's previously read text in order to clear all the other heroine routes, you'll find your auto-skip ending abruptly at random moments in random days, the new scenes relating to this girl stopping you in your tracks.



Hinayama Rio's introduced as a nervous wreck. She invites Hiroyuki to meet via letter, but she gets too scared to meet him, only showing herself once he gets angry. After stumbling over her words for a bit, she asks Hiro out. Yup, he has a secret admirer whom you're likely to run into very early on in a playthrough.

She's an especially memorable presence, even if you only see her a couple times in total during your pursuit of other routes.

Hiro turns her down because he has no idea who she is, and as Rio runs off, she trips over. Without shedding so much as a single tear, she keeps up her energetic persona and makes her clumsy escape from the scene.
But a couple days later, a mysterious figure appears on the map, and if you give in to curiosity, you'll find a little boy who has it out for Hiroyuki. Why? This "Hiroyuki" person made his older sister cry!

When Rio hears that her little brother picked a fight with Hiro, she just has to apologise, thus, the two finally have a proper conversation.
Put together, you get a really interesting combination. Most heroines in the game have one thing in common: they're a bit nonplussed by Hiroyuki. He is, to them and to us, a pretty normal guy. He's not especially smart, he prefers the easiest path through life in most cases, and ambition generally only appears alongside the desire to prove someone wrong.

But Rio puts him up on a pedestal. He'll give lazy, common advice and she'll be wowed by it. If he points out one of his own flaws, she'll somehow reverse it into a compliment.

It's easy to presume she simply idolises him for some reason, but she's not very smart, she's cursed with bad luck, and her family is poor, so a lot of the stuff that the others take for granted is special to Rio.

Combined with her odd design and her unique voice, Rio winds up feeling very different from all that came before.
She's the most comical girl in the game, and that makes her route a lot of fun to read. I'm gonna go so far as to say she has the most fun route in **ToHeart**, and while Hoshina is my favourite heroine, Rio here is my favourite character.

Hoshina as a character is completed by Hiroyuki, it's their interactions together that make her interesting, but… Rio is interesting on her own. She doesn't need a romantic element in her route; she works as a standalone character.

Poor, clumsy, bad at studying, incredibly unlucky, but always putting on a brave face. That's the kind of character she is, and as I was further exposed to these facts, it sort of made me consider her introduction. I mean, what leads a girl who's so busy and thinks so little of herself to ask someone out?

It's not even a question the route highlights, and I, of course, won't give the answer, but I appreciated how the setup and continuation combined to make me consider the heroine's thoughts without being pushed to in a transparent manner.

That sort of subtlety, put alongside Rio's cartoony moments, allows this route to truly encapsulate everything **ToHeart** is, in the best way possible.
This is a game about daily life, in the end.

There may be unrealistic oddities here and there—magic spells, human-like robots, human-like Americans—but the pomp, grand nature of a drama plot is rarely present. That sort of thing appears at the end of a few routes in a rushed manner, and **ToHeart**'s big weaknesses show in those moments. Its greatest strengths shine in silence.

When change happens to the world, only for us to catch up on it later.

Where relationships boil down to a string of pointless, transient chats.

How people live as themselves, with no pretension, no pretending.

The best of **ToHeart** is all here.

Final Thoughts!

Beyond the quality of the routes, there is the question of, well, presentation. The sprites are varied in expressions and outfits, but that's a bright spot in an otherwhile underwhelming display. The background art often incorporates a strange, unattractive color palette (a lot of green!) and the way text is presented is the most boring it could be. I kinda hate the font they use too...

There are some nice images to look at—both backgrounds and CGs—that spice up a scene... sometimes... but there's no real scene direction going on.
The presentation's beholden to the script.

The menus are functional. Plain backlog, acceptable save screen, but they're never going to surpass your expectations.
There are some sound effects, but there's no ambience, and a lot of onomatopoeia goes silent, so scenes can fall flat on the immersion front.

Then there's the music. I like the music, a lot of the tracks are iconic, but percentage-based judgement is benefitted by the small number of songs making up **ToHeart**'s soundtrack.
There really isn't enough, and I found myself growing sick of most of the music before I was halfway through a single route. It's the worst part of the entire experience.

The presentation issues are weirdly made more disappointing by the quality. The background art (colors aside) is brilliant, especially when it comes to placing background characters into the environments. The music that's here is really nice too. The overall aesthetic, as well as the atmosphere born from it, is incredibly endearing!

Admittedly, **ONE** and **Kanon** make up my favourite KeyTactics works, so I have a blatant bias towards the style of this period.

But the sheer mindlessness of the scene programming, with the lack of sound effects, and the constantly repeating music... it all drove me slightly mad.
It's exhausting how relentlessly uninteresting it can be at times. Also, wrangling with save files despite the limited slot count can be nightmarish. 100 slots isn't enough!

It's interesting looking back at old magazines from the time period **PSE** released into—one where the anime was beginning to air on TV and the fandom was at its height—the things people praise most about the game are... the story, the immersiveness, and the music.

I would consider those the weakest aspects of **ToHeart**.

Its strength is as an iyashikei script. Honestly, the rest almost holds it back.
And yet... for whatever reason, I've realized a fondness for parts of **ToHeart** that matches only **Parfait**, of the games I've so far reviewed. In the subtlety of the romance, yes. In the grounded banter, also. They're even similar in how they define character-specific speech patterns, becoming emotional beats of a story.

But it's in the unrelenting blandness that I find myself recalling days of old, you know? Before I could freely browse the internet, or play hundreds of games, or create whatever I wanted, there was a world where boredom existed.

There wasn't a distraction in every moment, an addiction in each day, and a conversation in every person. You had whatever was in front of you, little more.

That's the life Hiroyuki is living, and like anyone living during that time, he knows nothing of the future to come.

It's a life that could only exist in a time before this.
When phones were locked to a landline.
When games were best at an arcade.
When news came on printed paper.
When **ToHeart** was a sensation.

It's a time already gone.

While I was playing through PSE, the 3D remake released, and it was cheap! So I figured, as one of the few English sources covering the original game right now, I may as well give my opinion on the remake. Full transparency, I bought this game for this review with money donated by you kind readers. This is not an advert for ToHeart, but I didn't spend my own money on this, so keep that in mind.

1

When it comes to modern convenience, there's a built-in guide that you can toggle on/off, and this will push you along a selected route. Some of the routes are less fair than others with their choices, so I'm sure this'll be appreciated by some, but I know others will dislike this kind of guidance. It's entirely optional though, so I'd say it's a positive addition.

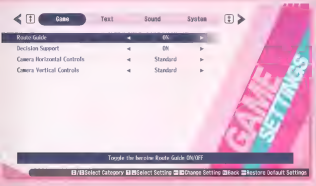
Next, another optional thing; new voice acting. Don't worry, the old voices are still present, but you can choose to use the new voice actors if you wish. This can be set per character, so it's more agency for readers. A great addition! I stuck with the new cast, for review's sake, but I'd definitely be annoyed if I couldn't listen to Rio's or Lemmy's old voices without mods. Oh, and Hiroyuki has a voice now, which is great.
But for music, you're stuck with new arrangements. I wasn't attached to PSE's and I think I prefer the new music for the most part, but Hoshina's theme now has an annoying mouse click-esque sound in it that drives me crazy.

2

You can change language via the title screen. The English translation definitely has its issues, some of which you'll catch even without knowledge of Japanese, but I've read worse. Most of my complaints stem from creative differences, as well as from the reality that most professional translation teams lack access to the game itself and are working in a spreadsheet. I don't envy them.

The radio isn't translated, I should mention. That's a shame, but the radio isn't crucial for any story stuff. You might feel like you're missing out though due to the lack of translation.

3



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Then there's the new UI. It is, in my opinion, a lot nicer to look at, but it's less functional. It feels designed for a controller, painfully so, and using a keyboard or mouse to navigate can feel a bit clunky.

There are also fewer save slots than in PSE somehow, but I suppose the in-game guide makes up for that... maybe?
But skipping is a lot slower, so maybe not!

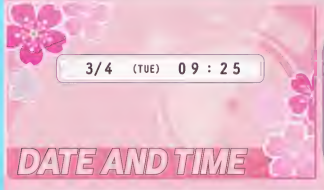
Also, if anyone could tell me which key on my keyboard [↕] is, I'd love to know.

PSE VS 3D

ToHeart

5

The new map screen is the best one so far, visually. The chibi artwork used is very cute. However, sometimes you have to actually walk around in a 3D space to get to the next scene, and as cool as that is to my PSE player self, I doubt the novelty will exist for new players, and it probably gets old fast.



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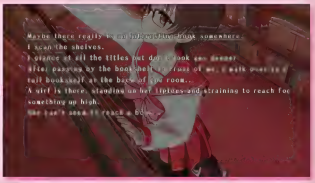
The day/time screen is a lot slower than PSE's analog clock implementation too. Also, the font used for the English day & time read-out is one I used for the date screen in... I think it was the LOOPERS demo translation, so that's a bit weird to see.

Actually wait, now that I'm editing this, doesn't the text at the bottom look a bit like how I style subheaders in articles? Did I make this screen!?

One nice touch is that you can toggle between that iconic 'Visual Novel' presentation style that Leaf's Visual Novel Series so often utilized and the more conventional adventure game style that has remained king for all these years.

I'm not gonna think less of you if you choose the textbox style, but some people might, and I'd agree with them.

7


Maybe there really is a ladder right somewhere.
I scan the shelves.
I glance at all the titles but don't look at them.
After passing by the book shelves at the back of the room,
I fall back on the back of the room.
A girl is there, standing on her tiptoes and straining to reach for
something up high.
She can't seem to reach a book.

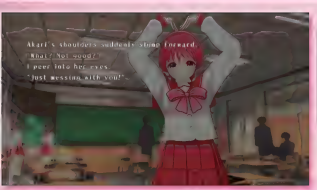
Presentation-wise, obviously the game is in 3D. This allows the visuals to be a lot more interesting. Historically, I've been far less harsh on CG anime than most, so maybe I'm more forgiving of this style of game.

I certainly appreciate the camera's ability to cut away to an interesting visual, or to pan over a moment gracefully... however the models of the characters are a downgrade from the sprites.
But look how good the 2D designs can look! Oh, and look at what they did to my boy Masashi!

8

PSE VS 3D

C-PIA.GITHUB.IO



As part of the transition to 3D, the direction takes on an approach more aware of space. Voices will muffle if distant. Characters once a disembodied voice now have some visual representation.
I prefer this to static sprites on static backgrounds, though it is a trade-off.
The 3D models aren't posed as expressively as the 2D sprites were, that's for sure. Still, **PSE**'s sprites were sometimes less expressive than **To Heart**'s were, so no version wins out in this category.

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Also, if you were worried that this Aquaplus title lacked the Leaf spirit of old, don't worry; the models suffer from clipping just as much as the ones in **Megiddo** did.
There is a bit of incongruity to be had due to the existence of modern technology within the environments, and that may also annoy you.

Sadly, the game is a bit of an optimization mess, and the issues mostly spiral around one root symptom: anti-aliasing.
I'm the kind of gamer who prefers windowed mode (I'm a 4:3 era person, after all) but this game's graphics get completely demolished by low resolutions. Bump up to full-screen and you'll find that, though not completely demolished, the anti-aliasing still leaves everything a blurry mess at 1080p!
So how high does the resolution need to go to render a sharp image? Uh... Higher than the settings allow... Yeah, it's not ideal.

11

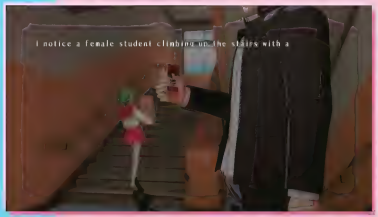
12

There are three graphics profiles, and I struggle to tell what visual changes they cause. Maybe it affects the shadows? The only real difference-maker is the resolution setting, to my eyes. Anything below 4k is awful.
To rub salt in the wound, you can actually use the graphic profile from the Switch version of the game by transferring files from the Switch copy over to PC. These settings being designed for a low-res console, they clear up the blurriness substantially and boost performance, but leave some visual noise behind. I'll put this solution up on the website if you want to give it a try, but these should really be settings. Even a config file would be better.

ToHeart

When it comes to the voices, it's a mixed bag, but everyone will feel differently about it. The new Akari is... there. Both Shihos sound very Shiho. Hearing Youmiya Hina's voice come out of Multi's mouth is hard to get used to; she does just sound like Hyacine. Serika's new voice actually vocalises some lines, and if you switch over to the old voice, you may as well be muting her. The option to listen to her voicelines even vanishes from the backlog! Look:

13



That change to Serika, plus the fact that Hiroyuki is voiced now, makes the Serika route so much better in my opinion. Conversations feel much more natural.
And on the topic of making things better, there were a substantial amount of instances in PSE where I felt the lack of a CG or a better-representing sprite harmed the quality of a moment. That, along with the limited music, was a very apparent restriction the creators had to work with back then. Naturally, the 3D remake improves my impression of a lot of those instances.

14

The new visuals, even the addition of more diverse sound effects, go a long way. However, it also has its own problems... Often, the scene will cut away to the scenery or fade to black in a place where PSE had an expressive sprite remain on-screen. Akari's great response to being hit on the head isn't here in this game, for example, but you do get to see things like Serika with her tarot cards spread out on the table or Multi's physical comedy in more than written word.

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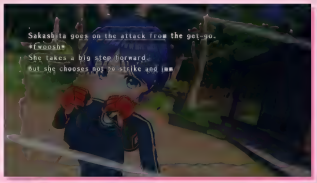

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The fancy camera does mess with a small bit of visual storytelling throughout Hoshina's route that 99% of readers would never notice, even if they read PSE, but it matters to me.
I do think they could've done a better job capturing the original CGs in this new artstyle. Some of them feel very phoned-in, with little effort put into framing them effectively. Though for new visuals, it's a slam dunk. Several scenes had me think... *"Yes! I get to actually see this!"*

PSE VS 3D

And content-wise, everything's here. Actually, when you factor in the DLC, this is the most content-rich version of **ToHeart**. Well, the mini-games aren't here, but they weren't really in **PSE** either, let's be honest.
There's no visual representation for Mine when you're listening to the radio, which I feel the loss of, but new readers won't know anything is amiss. Oh and, there's no dedicated option for Mine's voice, but switching the 'Other – Female' category to the legacy option will swap the modern radio recordings for the **PSE** versions.

17

18

It's easy to break down all that's changed, but the actual feeling of the game is what really matters, and there's something to be said about the pacing. Scenes frequently fade to black with a brief pause to load new environments.
The unskippable day/time screen is slow to animate and appears more often. There are full-on loading screens too! These constant disruptions act counter to the otherwise improved immersion, making it a bit hard to truly get invested in the story. I'm sure that's a bit exaggerated for me as I just got done reading this, and for someone completely new to **ToHeart**, they'll have some curiosity to cling onto, but I still think slogging it through the common route so often will be tough for some. Even with Cheat Engine speedhacks, it can be slow.

On the other hand, the casual pace of things might actually be a benefit in that it brings you deeper into the script's worldview. It is, as I've already described, a story from a bygone era where distractions were rarer, and it's far from high-octane. I can definitely imagine some readers growing used to this pace and appreciating the iyashikei effect even greater than I did with **PSE** as a result.

19

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In total, I don't think it's a complete replacement for **PSE**, and maybe that's for the best. It's a bit sad that there's still no definitive **ToHeart**, but it'd also be a bit sad to lose the **ToHeart**s of old to an outright better version.
Where 3D fails most is in its loading screens and filler animations. Where it succeeds is in patching up the limited budget or time-related problems of **PSE**, as well as the many small additions it makes to the visuals and sound.

If you asked me whether it's worth waiting for a **PSE** English patch over playing this version, I'd say no. If you're reading this after a **PSE** English patch has been made... well, pick whichever you prefer the artstyle of, I suppose.
If you're a particularly slow reader, the kind who spends a few months on a single work, you may be less annoyed by the remake's worst aspects. If repetitive music or limited visuals annoy you a lot, **PSE** might be a struggle. Personally though, I think this will be my go-to version going forward; the visual diversity does so much to improve the experience.

SOMETHING SP

Tayutama
-Kiss on my Deity-

SYSTEM

Originally released in 2008, today I'm playing the 2025 localised release of **Tayutama: Kiss on my Deity**. I'm mainly going to be focusing on a single route, but first, let's talk tech.

This is an Artemis Engine port, so it's very featureful. Language can be toggled at any moment. There are a lot of settings you can mess around with. It's very familiar if you've played other localised games using this engine.

But it does have the feel of the cheaper games. The UI is usable, yet plain. The sound effects are very recognisable, and their use reflects a *"play a sound just because we can"* design sense.
Usually, I'd obtain the original game or look up footage to check the differences between versions, but I remember playing a bit of **Tayutama** back in the Xbox 360 days, and I really don't recall it feeling so cheap, so I'm certain this is the result of the port job.

But once the game is going, you can ignore all that and focus on the script, the sprites, and the voice acting. Well... the sprites do have their own low-budget limits, but... Whatever! Let's just get on with the meat of the article!

Yuri is the son of a priest and a motorbike otaku, and he's busy wasting away his school break with friends when, passing by the school gates, they notice something seems amiss. The gates are usually kept shut, but today they're open. So they step inside and learn that, during some construction work, the workers had uncovered some ancient ruins.
It's here where we meet our heroine of choice: Kisaragi Mifuyu.

See, the school Yuri attends has a history. It was once a fancy all-girls school, but that ended a decade ago. Still, a standalone facility is kept around to maintain the school's legacy. They call that place 'Flawless'. That's its actual name, so of course, that's where all the ojousama are.

Mifuyu is being given a tour of the discovery by a teacher. Meanwhile, Yuri's friends are growing bored with the situation, so leave him behind, but one thing piques Yuri's curiosity.
He notices that part of the ruins resembles the shrine his family runs. So the next day, he returns to the scene alone and discovers a bunch of spirits that only he can see.

One thing leads to another, evil spirits infest the world, and now he's married to a fox girl--Mashiro.

There's some fantasy action plot going on, (just imagine Nanoha, but the enemies are yokai), but we're not here for that.
No one in this normal modern-day setting will believe in any of that nonsense, so the issue of who planted all of these bogus relics beneath the school to prevent their construction efforts takes up priority for the old and in-charge.

Mifuyu's mentor, who doesn't want the construction to happen, has become suspect number one, so Mifuyu is on the hunt for the real culprit, all to save her mentor from these false accusations.

SPECIAL ABOUT

Tayuta

Kiss on my Deity

Who does Mifuyu suspect? Yuri, of course! With her cool voice and logical way of thinking, Mifuyu is the perfect problem solver. She deduces problems that others around her are facing, and she even has the Phoenix Wright pose!

She's the perfect problem solver... for any situation other than this one. And let's talk about that voice!

She's voiced by Shizuka Itou, who aficionados will know as one of the voices of the tsundere ojou character in **Ore no Yome**! But no one played that, so you may know her for **Amagami**'s Morishima or **ToHeart2**'s Tamaki. Outside of bishoujoge, **Hayate**'s Hinagiku.

Her voice here is... I wouldn't call it deep, not when compared to some of her other roles, but Mifuyu has a refined demeanour, and her voice is suave. The pitch is probably quite similar to the others, but the delivery is pretty restrained in comparison. If I had to relate her to a character which readers are sure to know, I'd point to **CLANNAD**'s Tomoyo.

I highlight the voice not only because it's good, but because the game has a feature that allows you to store and replay up to 120 voice clips.
Somehow, this is the second game I've reviewed a localization of that has untranslated background voices! In my day, we'd at least get a stray txt file listing translations for all of them...

Anyway, Mifuyu's pridefulness manifests mostly as kindness towards her fellow ladies. She's meant to be not just an example for the others to follow, but a leader to guide them—like a lady prince. In order to help others, she's developed an analytical mind.

But the gap moe is present immediately because of one element in her design: the hairstyle. Those few messy strands of hair clue you in to a hidden side. Combined with the dramatic irony of knowing that her composed theorising won't hold much water in a setting of magic and mythology, and the path that Mifuyu will take is obvious. As the intro progresses, each new logical theory she arrives at in the face of madness only emphasises that.

In a sense, she is well-established and consistent. In another, she is predictable. Being realistic, this is a comedy-romance game that markets itself based on how cute the girls are, so I assume most people picking this game up are looking for comfort media.

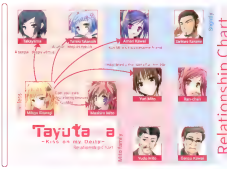
The target audience will surely appreciate getting such an early sense of what each route will be like before investing time into them, to get an idea of whether those routes will suit their tastes.

I say this from a disconnected perspective; although I can somewhat relate to those people, I'm not part of the target audience for this game. One reason is the tone, but another reason is the structure.

Tayutama's route design is odd; heavily frontloaded. You get a small number of choices, then after you have gotten past like... seven of them, the first arc ends, the OP plays, and you enter a heroine route. From then on, there's but one decision left to make, and it'll appear not long after the OP is over.

Because of the structure, there's little variance in the script before the choices are all done. This means that there's no time to really develop the emotions required for each route to begin.
Most of the time is spent on establishing the setting, the mechanics of the fanasy elements, our protagonist Yuri's relationship with the main heroine Mashiro, and finally, on telling the story of the initial arc, an arc that each route shares.

There's very little material connecting the start of the game to the other heroines' routes, so the transition away from the Mashiro route can feel pretty abrupt.



Tayutama
-Kiss on my Deity-

CRITIQUE

Aspects of the script feel incredibly rushed, and I mean rushed. For example, the last choice jumps you from the start of a scene to the end of one without any sort of pause or transition. I guess the writer didn't want to spend time detailing the emotions of the moment. It's a harsh switch from beginning to resolution.

The conversation following it has a metatextual layer that's hard to ignore, where characters say things not with the knowledge they've obtained, but with the words of a scriptwriter aware of the branching structure of a romance adventure game.

You could frame some of this in a positive context, though. Because of the structure, this is a (relatively) rare VN where the romance begins early into the story and carries on throughout. Is the romance always relevant? Ehh...

In our case, Mifuyu's route begins in the control room of a school styled after a command center the likes you'd see in a mecha anime—as an underwear-stealing yokai infiltrates Flawless. Wooden sword in hand, Mifuyu walks out into the night to pursue the invader.

Yes, from here on out, Mifuyu joins in the battle against evil spirits. When met with the truth, she's not going to remain a side character in this conflict.

Personality-wise, Mifuyu's the sort of idealist who hates hierarchy, yet she does hold some natural bias due to her upbringing. Within Flawless, she treats all of her fellow students equally. Outside of that, she can be slightly more judgmental towards people, yet she dislikes the idea that she might be viewed as better in some way than someone else just because of her class.
She refuses to believe in the power of bloodlines or birthrights. In her mind, anyone can do anything.

There is, of course, a self-serving aspect to these beliefs. You can view this as her not wanting people to attribute her achievements solely to her class while ignoring the effort she put in. The idea that she may be incapable of something because of the family she was born into goes against her sense of pride... But she does extend those beliefs onto others. People are a collection of achievements, and ambition is the primary factor in achievement.

Even so, her worldly experience is quite limited. She's young and relatively sheltered, and therein lay a dichotomy. She's certain in herself and truly believes in her own worldview, though she has a degree of awareness, enough to know that there's more to learn. So even if she acts self-assured at times, she'll usually be willing to step outside of her usual routine or loosen her interpretation of reality in order to learn something new.
She's confident, but flexible. I like that. In an old work, I wrote:

"Judgement isn't stagnant. She's unimportant, so we judge her and move on! And if she ever does become important... then new information comes along with her, and we learn from it."

ECIAL ABOUT

Kiss on my Deity

If you live your life chasing theoretical truth, you'll die as nothing and no one. It doesn't matter if you are demonstrably correct or not. No one cares.
I believe that thinking, itself, is meaningful enough. You thought it, you care about it; have confidence in that and live.

In pursuit of truth, Mifuyu is an individual who knows when to give up the chase. Driven by perception, she tries to make reality match that perception, and when it doesn't, she changes her viewpoint.

Sometimes alone, sometimes with the help of others, she constantly redefines her understanding of the world until it makes just a little bit more sense.

That's really what the character is. Her process is typically analytical and logical, yet she's also... well, an idealist. It's the inherent clash between the two—reality and ideals—that fosters her growth, forever unsatisfied with the conclusion she's arrived at; idealism doesn't often match reality for very long.

When her ideals are met, logic fights back. When the logical process tracks, her ideals refute it. In such a way, she opens her mind to more ways of life than someone of her status typically would.

I'm sure you could wrap all of this nuance up into a single word, such as 'curious', and you'd be correct, to an extent, but I find that words are rarely good at encapsulating the nuance of emotion, much like how, if my reviews ended with a score, the words behind the number would become meaningless.
As my psychology teacher once said, a label exists to reduce you.

Mifuyu is curious, but it's not like she's a creature of curiosity. She's not a cat. She's not a child who's just learned to question things. She's not a scholar seeking the answers to life.
All she is is a person, one who sometimes struggles to understand the world, yet thinks it best to learn. In a game about two species learning to accept one another, she really fits in.

I'm not exactly a fan of everything **Tayutama** does, but the structuring of Mifuyu's mind is interesting to look at. The way that she internalises the world and projects herself back onto it is absolutely the highlight of the work in my eyes.

If you're a fan of action comedy stories, and you don't mind some roughness so long as the product is cheesy enough, I think you'll like **Tayutama**. The characters have a lot to like about them.
Ameri was also very fun. If you're a fan of tsundere childhood friends, you'll surely want to read this.

A Sepia Lens Look at...

Games are not reality.
A statement hardly surprising, I'm sure we all understand. The days of old are not the days of today, but let's consider what a day may be.

Are you truly nostalgic for these old games, or are you nostalgic towards the surrounding past? The life I'm living now is a far better time than the '00s were, so I can be certain in my answer. There's only one game that fills me with longing for a time and place.

Ai Sp@ce was an MMO – a fictional world that I spent about a year of my life in.
It was a false Akihabara that I, a person who has never set foot in Akiba proper, grew up in.
It's where I got my name.
It was fiction, it was a game, but it was real.

CULTURE IS A BUBBLE.

I grew up in a place where... well, walk an hour in any direction and you'd find people who spoke differently, who felt, to me, like they'd come from a different world.
My world was a rainy seaside town, and zooming in a bit, a single cobbled street.
It was a busy place—full of tourists—as I've said before, but the passing footsteps were like raindrops to the sea; an ocean will still be there tomorrow.

Think back to the age of **GoldenEye**, by the Hortis—not the Campbell—of Martinkind.
I lived on a market street, old England style. A cafe on a corner, a place to buy your morning newspaper, the old sweet shop, a store for fruit, and one for meat, one for fish, one for grain. The smell of incense was always strong.
All of them were run by families, ordinary people whom you knew. It came with a slight hippy vibe, as the owners either were around for the '60s or were the children of that generation.

Step into a restaurant, you'd see paintings old a few hundred years. Plaques dedicated to a sailor decades dead, to a fisherman of a hundred years ago, to a poet over a thousand years old.
You'd hear stories, fables, of a man lost at sea, or of a haunted lighthouse capping a rickety, wooden pier.
The lady whose hair caught fire, burning her away.
Of a mound where fae rest in peace, where one false step could curse your luck.
The black dog—barghest—who roamed the streets, heralding death with the sound of chains.
History and loss.

This was the view from my front door as a little brat. Very homely, it was.

A step away, the beach, where sailors, fishers, rowers, swimmers, and all the town's life would meet.
Old ships, 17th century, would rest to garner praise.
A lifeboat would speed by, saving kids from the waves.
Two hundred steps from home stood a church where Kings and Queens were laid to rest. Settled by Anglo-Saxons, raided by the Danes, bombed by the Germans. It's older than the word "England" itself.

In Summer, busking musicians would liven the streets, and bunting would fill the world with colour.
In Winter, the cobbled roads grew quiet, then from the buildings high, bright fairy lights would paint the place with a festive charm at night.
If I ask myself, *"was any of that fun?"* the answer is clear: No, not really... but it was home to me.

The passing footsteps were indeed like raindrops to the sea, but one day, our oceans will be sand.
Nothing will forever be.
By the time of my little sister's birth, that world was gone. Some locals had been priced out; others had passed on. Local shops shut down to make way for conglomerates. Smartphones replaced our hangout spots.
History and loss.
My sister never got to live in that world; it's gone.

Sometimes I wonder why. I ponder who or what to blame, or consider how it may return, but the reality is, the past is dead.
The culture I still think of as my own... it existed for the briefest of moments. It had no name, and neither the memories nor the feelings of those days will mean anything to you. I don't want them to; let them die.
Indeed, nothing will forever be. Even a wave lasts mere moments, yet man will try to ride it for as long as he can.

CULTURE IS A SPACE

Introducing the internet! Heard of it? I was a noob, really. It hadn't been long since I'd played **Shuffle!** and **Kanon**, the **Clannad** anime had just wrapped up, and I recall browsing a usual forum.
The early 2009 news cycle there brought my attention to a curiosity: **Ai Sp@ce** was an in-dev MMO that combined the world of **Shuffle!** with the worlds of **Clannad** and **Da Capo II**.
I uh... I took the time to read the original **Da Capo** first, but by the time I was done, **Ai Sp@ce** was out!

> I used to try and replicate game CGs when I was first learning to draw, but apparently the only one that's survived 16 years on the internet is this **Da Capo** one.
> My mom might have some of the others on paper somewhere...
> If you thought I was bad at art now, just know I've come a long way.

Now, when I say "MMO", I bet a decent chunk of you automatically append "RPG" to it in your mind, but **Ai Sp@ce** wasn't that. To be honest, calling it a game would be generous. It was a social MMO.
Think **Habbo Hotel**, **Club Penguin**, **Second Life**. Wow, why are all the EN examples I can think of so odd? Put plainly, **Ai Sp@ce** was a fancy chat room. A big 3D space full of players, each one with a human avatar, with additional microtransaction incentives by way of dolls; artificial lifeforms serving as companions.

The player and their customizable doll were dropped into the setting of one of the involved IPs: **Clannad**, **Shuffle!** and **Da Capo II**.
The dolls would match the style of the IP you chose, and they were like a partner in a sort of minimalist **LovePlus** scenario.
A player could hang out with the AI alone (if they were that much of a loner) and they'd still have a decent time interacting with the game for a bit.

WELCOME TO AKIHABARA

Each setting also got a unique character who was designed to help players out early on, and as time passed, they began to factor into the game's short story missions, all presented in visual novel fashion. Sometimes these stories would include characters from the three relevant VNs, and sometimes these characters would even be voiced!

The voice actors for **Ai Sp@ce**'s three unique ladies would appear on frequent radio show streams, *which may or may not be the cause of why I often watch those kinds of things, even today.*
The streams, as well as those previously mentioned microtransactions, were handled by Dwango's Nico Nico Douga, and so, the online infrastructure of the game was incredibly dependent on that service.
You could view the game as one big advertisement platform for Nico Nico, but therein lay an appeal, I believe. It was a hodgepodge of otaku fandom stuff.

It was also blatantly pay-to-win in some regards. Not meaningful ones, but still, they really wanted players to spend. Gacha Gacha!

The three independent settings joined together in the hub town: Akihabara, a small recreation of the Akihabara of the times.
Akiba, of course, had been going through its own changes during the 2000s, transforming a subculture hub of PCs and PC games into a flanderized place of exploitative pandering, which... well, that's yet another street I mourn the loss of.

Ai Sp@ce's interpretation of the town was more a glorified reflection of the two identities. Openly weeby, advertising eroge, but with that lingering sense of sanitised business.

In this fictionalised Akihabara, players could gather together to interact, show off their accounts, and sometimes engage in activities.
Most of these activities were pretty lame and one-note, in my opinion, sometimes even limited to certain times of the year.
Plus, I was a foreigner playing this Japan-only MMO with almost no knowledge of Japanese, so the social side of things was intimidating.

I'm pretty sure I was playing at a sub-7 FPS most of the time, which made things a bit harder. This game was not built for the average bishoujoge-focused computer user.

There was an English fanbase, albeit small, but I didn't interact with them much, save for a rare forum post whenever the servers were down, so... maybe I am that much of a loner.

That being said, watching crowds of people gather together, converse, emote, and compete was very fun, particularly if the participants had blogs I could stalk or detailed profiles I could gaze at.
It wasn't the real Akihabara, of course, but that digital space housed real people, and with them came a real culture.

Ai Sp@ce

I WAS SURROUNDED BY WHAT I LOVED.

If there was a new game, a new anime, a new song, people would be talking about it, and they'd be excited. Well... that, or they'd be talking about food...

Despite my antisocial ways, I did end up becoming friends with a few of the familiar names.
I fondly recall blowing someone's mind by casually telling a **Kinnikuman** joke; they didn't expect a foreigner to know that one.
I knew this guy who would change his doll's outfit constantly, always holding photoshoots. You'd walk down the street and there he was, doing his thing.

You had your superfans, too. One user, I swear, just wanted people to read **Negima**. That was his purpose in life. I still haven't read it, sorry.

WELCOME TO AKIHABARA

It was always nice to bump into characters who looked straight out of **Shuffle!** while I was walking around with a custom **Clannad** character design. The novelty of that never wore off, for me.

What voiced content there was, I could enjoy. There were a few English-language summaries for some content too, which helped. The game's sense of humour was very similar to **Kami Nomi zo Shiru Sekai**'s, my favourite manga and anime at the time.
Kinda cheesy, kinda kiddy, but hey, that's what I enjoyed.

It's from that age of stories like **Seto no Hanayome** or **Nogizaka Haruka no Himitsu**, the second of which had just finished airing at the time. And who could forget **Lucky Star**?

And remember, Nico Nico. The month-to-month of **Ai Sp@ce** was intimately tied to the video platform, and that meant you could watch videos in-game.
Buy a TV, put it in your room, and bam, you've got an ingame video streaming service!

Now if only there were a big TV in each of the large gathering areas, so that everyone could get together and watch things... oh, there was!
It would buffer a lot, but it was 2009, so we were used to it.

ai space アイスペース

But, as you might be able to tell from my description, there was little meat on the bone of this product, and the novelty of it being set within familiar environments with familiar characters didn't lead to anywhere near as much fan service and what-if scenarios as you'd think.
Was it fun? ...I dunno. Was there anything to do? Sometimes, but often no. It was an empty game that didn't last very long... but it was home.

To give it some fair perspective, I would say similar things about **Animal Crossing**, but I assuredly spent at least a hundred hours playing that game on my DS back in the day. That was a far less social experience!

For those who know me well, you'll know that I later wasted two years of my life on a similarly contentless MMO as soon as **Ai Sp@ce** shut down. The amount of stuff to do didn't matter; if you've already tied yourself to an MMO, it's hard to escape it.
Every person who's once been addicted to an MMO will tell you that those days were equally the best and worst time of their lives.
These simulated spaces become a home to those who spend time in them, and from the start of the 2010s, these sorts of digital worlds were where I lived. Still, it's natural to move on, eventually.

At a certain point, I think the only thing keeping people attached was the customizable dolls. They were good simulations at the time, you could alter their appearance, their personality, even script them to a degree, and they played a leading role in the story, so your custom character was interacting with heroines from actual big-name games.
No other game provided this, at the time, whether MMO or single player.

And for me, that young me, I loved the mundane, unvoiced interactions that would sometimes pop up. A character you love suddenly appearing on screen to say hello, good morning, Merry Christmas. Maybe that's because I could understand those easy interactions though, ahaha.
Still, that's another thing you likely won't find at all, anywhere, in visual novels, even now. **Inoue Ryouko** meets **Artificial Girl** — that's how I'd describe it.

But the population was flagging. At the start of 2011 things still felt exciting. Bushiroad (one of the companies ever-present within the game's marketing efforts) had just launched their **Cardfight!! Vanguard** franchise, which I loved. Meanwhile, **Steins;Gate** fever was at an all-time high, with an anime adaptation beginning in April along with its own marketing storm centred around Akiba. That was a special one for me.
Vocaloid was really kicking it up a notch with Crypton Future Media's live concerts, putting Miku, Luka, Rin and Len on stage to mind-blowing effect.
Eroge may have reached the other side of the bell curve, but the culture was still strong. I never wanted it to end.
Yet, despite the time I had with it, I didn't stick with **Ai Sp@ce** until the end. The writing was on the wall: the game wouldn't last for much longer.

The game was set to shut down in June of 2011. To be honest with you, I'd stopped playing months prior, before the closure was announced, even. I hadn't planned to stop, of course. As I said before, I didn't want it to end; the game was like a home to me, and as brief as my time there may have been, a daily routine is comforting... but it all came crashing down.
A wave may last mere moments, yes, but some moments are hard to forget.

I awoke one morning, in the privilege of safety, to news of a tsunami.
The Great East Japan Earthquake.
The people I'd been playing with until now... were they safe?
There was no way to communicate. No way to ask. No way to know.
If the game's servers came back up (were that ever a priority) would the usual names still be there, logged in and waiting for other players?
I didn't know the answer, I never would. It was over, that's what mattered.

For reasons beyond my control, the daily life I'd been leading came to an end, and I couldn't even stop to internalise it; in another place, far from my real home, the ones I'd been living alongside were in danger.
There was no one to blame, no reason to regret, no hope of going back.
What are you even supposed to feel?
That was how it came to an end, that innocent place of mine.
It had a name, and maybe my memories and feelings of that game will mean something to you. Maybe not in this exact form, likely with a different end, but surely we've all had that... A place once had, that can never be again.

I'm sure, if there was real demand and maybe some cash involved, some smart cookie could get a private server up and running. Maybe the world of **Ai Sp@ce** could be reborn.
But the world is not enough. The people, the trends, the memories – they weren't made by the game; you didn't even have to play the game for that. If you were browsing Nico Nico Douga, listening to Vocaloid-sung **Touhou** remixes and geeking out over **Haruhi**, **G-Senjou**, **Koihime Musou**, and **Zero no Tsukaima**, you were there, with me, living that life.
The culture was larger than a place, and you, like me, will be aware that even though all those IPs still exist, that place in time is already gone

The past is dead. Very little of it remains, and day by day, there'll be less and less rubble to reminisce over. Sometimes I feel like I'm stuck there, lost, unable to look away; drifting back and forth between the past and the today. It might sound strange for me to say, in a magazine made to praise old games, but I need to emphasise this point: Don't look back.

Sure, we can't return to every game, but y'know, for most of them, we can!
We have the luxury of being able to boot up old software with ease, whenever we wish, on all kinds of systems. But they're all fiction.
In reality, yesterday is dead, and it'll never return. Every day, a new farewell.

The things I've told you today are retellings once heard by my brain, from a younger me who remembered better, felt stronger, and really, really cared.
With each remembrance, they dilute a little, like raindrops to an ocean.
Emotions boiled down to words, only to be regurgitated again and again, becoming fables from a storyteller who turns haze into entertainment.
Each time, a detail gets lost here or there. I can't even remember their names.
It's a degradation of the heart.

The town I grew up in is gone.
The fictional Akihabara I lived in is gone.
The real Akihabara we love is gone.
And the days before the waves hit are gone.
All they are... are stories now.

The tide of change will come for you soon, so don't look back.
Some things will always be here for you, but you won't always be here.
Not you, these streets, these places, these people. Not even these memories.
What matters today will mean little, in due time, but tomorrow never ends.
So don't look back.
Don't take these days for granted. Be ready to leave them behind.

THANKS FOR READING!

SOURCE PLEASE:

2 - Rapid Reviews

Screenshots from:
GS Mikami: Joreishi wa Nice Body (SFC)
Gals Panic S2
Silhouette Stories
Fuujin Ryouiki Eretzvaju

3 - Contents

Hinayami Rio from ToHeart PSE.
Promotional artwork of Kisaragi Mifuyu from Tayutama.
Da Capo II's Yukimura Anzu, from AiSp@ce.

5 to 8 - News

All sources available at c-pia.github.io

9 to 21 - What Are You Reading?

Box art from the following ToHeart versions: PS2, PSX, PSE.
Box art from To Heart.
Box art & logo from WHITE ALBUM -Tsuzurareru Fuyu no Omoide-
Screenshots from To Heart.
Screenshots and assets from ToHeart PSE.

22 to 26 - What Are You Reading?

Screenshots, logo and assets from ToHeart (2025).
Mod information from Steam user Timo654.

27 to 30 - Something Special About...

Screenshots, logos and assets from Tayutama: Kiss on my Deity.

31 to 34 - A Sepia Lens

Screenshots from AiSp@ce, taken from various Nicovideo uploads.
Logo from http://aisp.jp/
Tsukishiro Alice CG from Da Capo Plus Communication.

Kyacchi22

This issue of C-pia! Magazine was the sole creation of Takafumi Sakagami @ Kyacchi22.

This magazine is made for free and given out for free. If you'd like to support the creation of future issues, please share the magazine around with those who might be interested.

This may be a solo project, but we're always looking for contributions. If you love something, shout it out!

Without the work of other people, we'd have nothing to talk about in these pages, so I hope you don't mind if we dedicate a page to shouting out our sources.

Trivia!

I don't recall which old magazine I found this in, but I found this bit about the relatively new 'visual novel system' in **To Heart** quite fun.

The writer explains that, unlike the previous standard within AVGs of having the text appear in a dialogue box, the visual novel system lets you display large amounts of text over the images.
Blending the visuals and the novel into one display! How novel!

I'm sure they'd be confused to learn that many fans nowadays think of a dialogue box when "visual novel" is said!

C-pia!

This magazine is distributed for free.

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